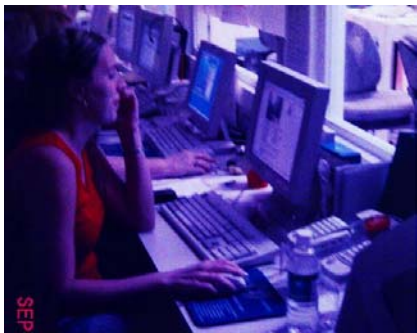


KDHE Staff Assist Florida Hurricane Emergency Efforts

Judee Walden and Nicola Areshenko, representing KDHE's Bureau of Air & Radiation, were recruited by the Emergency Management Agency Compact to assist in the disaster recovery efforts in Martin County, Fl. after Hurricane Frances struck the state in September.

Team members (five from Kansas) were put on alert Friday afternoon, Sept. 3, and left for duty on Sept. 7. The deployment was a scheduled 16-day commitment, with 14 days on the ground working the field. Upon arrival in Florida, the magnitude of the disaster could be seen. Few or no streetlights, signal lights, or signage was in place, and without power, nor fuel, many businesses were shut down and roads were blocked by debris.



Emergency Management Director Keith Holman assigned the Florida team to tasks at the Martin County Emergency Operations Center, (EOC). Upon arrival, the EOC staff was weary from the 30-hour sustained winds of Hurricane Frances, as well as, the protective operations prior to the hurricane's landing and the hours of recovery following Frances. Operations at Martin County were streamlined and well defined, with 19 functions defined by pre-disaster planning.



Areshenko (top) works on tracking tasks while Walden (above) met staff needs during the pair's September volunteer tour in Hurricane-ravaged Florida.

Walden stepped into the Programs Assistant's shoes and managed staffing and their needs at the EOC, she also attended meetings with applicants for public assistance to prepare for FEMA officials. Areshenko transmitted tracker requests from Martin County to the state of Florida. As the days past and staff returned to the EOC, Kansas members broadened their duties to include identifying unmet needs, damage assessments, and housing issues.

The team worked, at the minimum, 12-hour shifts, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Each day, members teamed up to take on the day's projects and to combine skills, knowledge, and expertise to work out details of such tasks as housing and medical needs, distribution of ice, water and tarps, volunteer labor, damage assessment, and assistance to public employees in their recovery efforts. Roundtable briefings were held at the EOC on a regular basis to keep everyone updated on their progress and current activities and to help resolve problems that occurred during the recovery process.

Martin County officials rewarded Kansas' team members for all their hard work and efforts with a fish fry and an evening meal to show their appreciation. The team returned home exhausted after many hours of work and content with the knowledge they made a difference for Floridians in Martin County.